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ABSTRACT

Problems such as finding quality placements for students, transporting them to their placements, providing adequate supervision from the campus, and establishing communication between campus and school faculty have caused teacher educators to avoid early field placement. A description is given of how the West Genesee/Syracuse University Teaching Center (New York) has dealt with these problems. Through a joint agreement between the school district and the university, faculties and students cooperate to develop programs for continuous pre- and in-service teacher education. The center's Directing Council consists of faculty and administrators from both institutions, and the center coordinator sits on committees both at the university and the school district. The concerns of each group are carried to the other, and, as a result, very clear guidelines are established for each level of field placement. Classroom teachers share in the evaluative process. University professors meet with the classroom teachers to discuss assignments and clarify what type of experience that it is expected the classroom teacher will allow the preservice teacher. The classroom becomes a laboratory in which the preservice teacher tests materials, teaching strategies, and self. The university and school faculties are equal partners in establishing the atmosphere. An outline of the university's core course for preservice teachers is included. (JD)

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The debate about the importance, perhaps even the justification, of field placements - especially early field placements - is currently at the forefront of discussions about preservice training. More and more states are requiring increased field experiences to qualify for certification. This in large part has been in response to the recommendations coming from various national studies on the quality of education such as A Nation At Risk. Although the potential value of "hands-on" experiences in the schools has long been recognized, the problematic history of such experiences has caused teacher educators to seriously question their value. Problems such as finding quality placements for students, transporting students to their placements, providing adequate supervision from the campus and establishing quality communication between campus and school district faculty have caused teacher educators to avoid early field placements. The purpose of this article is to share how the Division for the Study of Teaching within the School of Education at Syracuse University in collaboration with several local school districts has dealt with such problems.

Overview. The collaborative effort between the university and the school districts has been accomplished through two teaching centers. Of specific interest to two of these writers is the West Genesee/Syracuse University Teaching Center (WG/SUTC) and it is to this specific center that we will refer in the following discussion.

Of no minor importance is the fact that this is the tenth birthday for the WG/SUTC. Through a joint agreement between the West Genesee Central School District and Syracuse University, the faculties and students cooperate to develop programs for continuous preservice and inservice teacher education. Through this relationship, both partners have received benefits and services

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from the other which would not otherwise have been available. As such, a process has developed which provides for the training needs of both partners through a comprehensive program for pre- and inservice teacher education. Although the inservice component is equally important, our purpose here is to highlight the field-based preservice program.

The Preservice Program. This program is based on the theoretical premise of Teacher as Decision Maker. As such, both campus instruction and field experiences are designed to provide individuals with options and the thinking processes for selection and implementation of options.

Table 1 provides a list of the Core courses and number of hours spent in the field for each course. "Study of Teaching" develops techniques of inquiry for use in determining how teaching can be more effective. "Personalizing Teaching and Learning" is designed to provide knowledge and skills in differentiating among learners and environments so that appropriate environments may be created for better learning. Students not only learn eight different models of teaching in "Strategies of Teaching" but practice them in peer teaching sessions and in small group classroom settings. The "Methods" course provides for planning lessons, developing units, evaluating curricula and materials with each newly acquired skill being practiced in the field under the guidance of university faculty. "Student Teaching" is a carefully supervised, full-time teaching experience. "Teacher Development" emphasizes the analyses of one's own teaching behaviors. Students synthesize and practice the use of content, processes and skills which were learned and tested during previous course work.

Problems and Solutions. As indicated earlier, many problems plague the success of field-based programs. We, too, have faced the same problems. But what makes our program different is that the collaborative effort has provided a vehicle for managing or at least minimizing most problems. Perhaps, a few examples will best serve this discussion.

Table 1

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

CORE COURSES

YEAR	COURSE	FIELD REQUIREMENT
Frosh/Soph	Study of Teaching	2 hrs. per wk. (smstr)
	Personalizing Teaching/Learning	2 hrs. per wk. (smstr.)
	American School	none
Junior	Strategies of Teaching	2 hrs. per wk. (qrtr)
	Methods (elem.)	216 hrs.
	(sec.)	2 hrs. per wk. (qrtr)
Senior	Teacher Development (elem.)	(concurrent w/ Stu. Tchg.)
	Student Teaching (elem.)	full time (smstr)
	(sec.)	full time (qrtr)

Several years ago as the field component of the inservice program was being developed, no one had clearly defined what the university students should do during their two-hour weekly visits to the schools. University professors were concerned that asking classroom teachers to accept too much responsibility would be unfair. At the same time, the teachers were asking how they could help, what was expected during the field experience and who would be evaluating the student's performance. In many instances, the sophomore and junior students were expected to perform as student teachers. Discontent existed both on campus and in the field.

Fortunately, such problems were discussed openly and frankly by the center's Directing Council. This council, which consists of faculty and administrators from both institutions and the center coordinator (whose salary is shared by the institutions) has as its responsibilities setting policy, advising, and causing dialogue between its members. As such, its members are responsible for carrying the concerns of the others back to his/her own home base. Additionally, the center coordinator sits on committees both at the university and the school district. Thus, this individual is part of the "in-group" at both locations and is expected to represent the needs of both. With these various factors in operation, the concerns of each group indeed are carried to the other. As a result, very clear guidelines have been established for each level of field placement. Classroom teachers do share in the evaluative process. University professors meet with the classroom teachers to discuss the assignments and some even teach mock lessons for the teachers to illustrate what is expected of the preservice teacher. Classroom teachers contribute as to the reasonableness of the expectations. The emphasis here is not on perfection but rather on illustrating the type of experience that it is expected the classroom teacher will allow the preservice teacher. And it is expected that the professor be able to define each field requirement. The classroom has

become a laboratory in which the preservice teacher tests materials, strategies and self. The university and school faculties are equal partners in establishing that atmosphere.

The equalness of this relationship is highlighted by the Junior Block field experience. Formerly, the students visited classrooms for two-hours on Monday, Wednesday, Friday for about seven-weeks. Classroom teachers found discontinuity, university professors felt that they had not provided enough content/guidelines before students went to the field and students felt torn between discontinuity in the field and a need to maintain campus obligations. By discussing these concerns and experimenting with alternatives, a solution was reached. The students now meet with the professor on campus for seven weeks during which time they visit the classroom for two-hours a week. During this time, each student is expected to get to know the students, consult with the teacher and write a unit in cooperation with the classroom teacher. Then, the students participate in the classroom on a daily basis for five weeks. Some of the requirements during this period include the teaching of the unit just developed, getting to know and interview the school personnel and testing a variety of teaching strategies. Both campus professors and center personnel visit the classrooms to gather and provide feedback. The final weeks are spent on campus analyzing the field-experiences.

Explicitly stated, the program has a conceptual base which is operationalized through the joint efforts of campus and field. Therefore, the field experiences are developmentally sequenced as well as carefully guided.

Advantages. The advantages of such a program are many. Most apparent is the process for communicating which has led to negotiation and the defining of expectations for all involved. But there are advantages beyond the most obvious. As one of these writers has so aptly stated, "The school district is not part of this program for altruistic reasons. There has to be something

in it for the district, its teachers and students." Working with the preservice program has brought to the district a continual update of current research on teaching, techniques for continuous inservice teacher education and stimulation for all its members. For the University, a major advantage is an ever-increasing cadre of sophisticated school-based teacher educators.

Looking to the Future. This inservice teacher education program remains fluid, not watery but certainly not set in concrete. As changes occur at each institution, the frsutrations and joys of seeking appropriate responses will need to continue. It is important that while being responsive to its participants, the integrity of the program must be maintained.